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USSR - MIDDLE EAST: Visit of Arab League Delegation

The Soviets will try to portray the visit to Moscow of the Arab League delegation composed of seven Arab Foreign Ministers and Jordan's King Hussein as proof that the USSR has a major role to play in the Arab-Israeli peace process.

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Members of the delegation begin arriving today and will go on to Beijing this weekend. Their purpose is to explain the peace proposal formulated by Arab League members at their summit at Fez in early September. Similar Arab League delegations have already visited Washington and Paris.

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Saudi Foreign Minister Saud, who is a member of the delegation, is the highest level Saudi to visit the USSR since relations were suspended in the mid-1930s. The Soviets have proposed a separate meeting with him, and a senior Saudi official told a US official on Monday that Saud would accept. The Saudis also have told the US that, if there had been progress on a peace settlement, Saud would not be going to Moscow.

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Comment: General Secretary Andropov almost certainly will meet with the delegation. The visit will provide him with his first public opportunity to address Middle Eastern affairs. The USSR will castigate the US peace initiative and urge the Arabs to embrace its call for an international conference on the Arab-Israeli question as the best way to implement the Fez proposal.

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Moscow, which has long sought improved ties with Riyadh, would consider a separate meeting with Saud a political coup. Another senior Saudi figure, however, recently informed US officials that Saud was instructed to tell Moscow that there is no chance for improved relations as long as Soviet forces remain in Afghanistan.

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LIBERIA: Risky Economic Measures

Head of State Doe yesterday announced an across-the-board salary cut of up to 25 percent for all government employees, apparently including the military, to take effect on 1 January. He also instituted less drastic measures to reduce deficit spending, including the retirement of all public workers over 65. Doe also established, on the other hand, a rent-control commission and lifted the surcharge on most imported goods. [redacted]

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Comment: The long-overdue austerity plan is Doe's first firm action to persuade Liberians of the seriousness of the economic situation. The measures, however, may touch off civil unrest. The Army's reaction to the reduction in their privileges will be crucial for Doe. Salary cuts could provoke coup plotting. [redacted]

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